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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1604
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 8512
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 4655
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY 4186
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 1361
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1940
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1913
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 8229
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN PRIORITY 1102
RUCQSOC/USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RHCUAAA/USCINCTrans SCOTT AFB IL PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUCJICL/COMUSMARCENT HQ MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUFTNAB/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHRMDBA/MARCENT COORD ELEM BAHRAIN PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

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TAGS: [EWWT](#) [PHSA](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [IMO](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: NEW SEARCH AND RESCUE CENTER MAY BOLSTER
ANTI-PIRACY EFFORTS IN THE REGION

REF: NAIROBI 1707

1. Summary: The recent launch of a new regional search and rescue center in Mombasa could potentially serve as crucial resource in furthering maritime security in the region. However, the limited capacity of maritime forces may undermine the center's effectiveness. Incidents of piracy in the region remain a concern for authorities, and at least one Kenyan official has expressed interest in ways to co-ordinate anti-piracy efforts with U.S. and multinational maritime forces operating in the region. End Summary.

Expanding SAR Coverage

2. (U) A new Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Center (MRCC), supported by the International Maritime Organization, was launched in Mombasa on May 5. The new Center will serve as a search and rescue center to receive and relay messages of vessels in distress along Africa's eastern coast. The Center is one of five MRCC's planned to enhance effective search and rescue coverage along the coasts of Africa; three are planned for West Africa and another is expected to open in Cape Town, South Africa, later this year. The new MRCC in Mombasa is part of this regional search and rescue system and will extend coverage along the Eastern coast of Africa out into the Western Indian Ocean. Two Maritime Rescue Sub-Centers are located in Victoria, Seychelles and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. According to Peter Thuo, the Director of Shipping and Maritime Affairs at Kenya's Ministry of Transport, the Center is fully operational, equipped with two satellites to receive signals from as far away as the Atlantic ocean. All that remains is for the Center to send out a maritime notice, informing vessels of which frequencies to use to contact the Center. All vessels fitted with Global Maritime Distress and Safety Systems will be able to respond to such ship to shore alerting.

An SOS, But Then What?

13. (SBU) Once a vessel's distress signal is received by the Center, the MRCC will broadcast the message to all vessels in the area, who then would render assistance to the vessel in need. While the primary function of the Center is to enhance search and rescue operations, this system may have applications in instances of piracy off the coast of Somalia. Thuo told poloff he hopes to see the Center expand into assisting in responding to acts of piracy (and, indeed, this is the angle that has received the most public media play in Kenya). He expressed the hope that the Center might be able to liaise with the U.S. maritime forces in the region and/or CTF-150 to relay piracy-related distress messages and involve such international forces in anti-piracy operations. For the time being, however, the Center will primarily have to rely on merchant vessels (including cargo and passenger ships) to respond to distress messages as Kenya lacks a national coast guard and its navy lacks the capacity to effectively respond to distress calls. According to Thuo, Tanzania's naval capabilities are significantly below even that of Kenya. He suggested that capacity building training and equipment for the Kenyan Navy may be one way in which the USG can contribute to strengthen regional effectiveness.

14. (SBU) While welcoming the role of international forces in the region, Thuo stressed that the capabilities of the region's host nations need to be bolstered to effectively respond to maritime security issues. He informed poloff that increased regional maritime interdiction capabilities was among the priority recommendations resulting from the regional anti-piracy conference sponsored by Kenya held in Mombasa in late February. The Conference concluded with plans for a Joint Communiqué on piracy issues, which has yet to be finalized or published. Thuo assured poloff that an

official report on the conference would be forthcoming. Thuo expressed the desire to hold a follow-on conference or meeting with relevant parties to evaluate where things stand on the issues raised at the February conference.

Kenya's Commitment to Maritime Security

15. (SBU) Should the MRCC expand its mandate to include anti-piracy efforts, the Center could play an instrumental role in ensuring maritime security in the region. Kenya has signed and ratified the UN Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA), but has yet to incorporate the provisions into domestic law. A new Merchant's Shipping Bill, which would domesticate the SUA Convention, is ready to be presented before Parliament. However, given the National Assembly's lackluster performance in swiftly passing much needed legislation, it likely will be sometime before the bill becomes law. Poloff has urged the GOK to support the 2005 SUA Protocols, which are ready for signature in Geneva, and while yet to receive an official response on the GOK position, has been assured informally that Kenya views the protocols favorably (reftel).

Comment

16. (SBU) Thuo's candid comments about the state of readiness of Kenyan and regional maritime forces underscores the limited effectiveness of the MRCC in responding to distress signals and incidences of piracy. His statements on hoped-for cooperation between the Center and international forces based in the region is encouraging. However, the dearth of resources Kenya is able to draw upon to address piracy near its shores will continue to undermine any national or regional solutions.

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